

What is claimed is:

1. A method in a video distribution system, comprising:
creating, at a set-top box, viewer preference data representing subject matter of interest to the viewer;
transmitting the viewer preference data from the set-top box to a remote device;
receiving updates to the viewer preference data at a web server; and
updating the viewer preference data at the remote device in accordance with the updates received at the web server.
2. The method claimed in claim 1, wherein the remote device is provided at a head end device of the video distribution system.
3. The method claimed in claim 1, wherein the remote device is provided at a multiple service operator device of the video distribution system.
4. The method claimed in claim 1, further comprising transmitting the updated viewer preference data from the remote device to the set-top box.
5. The method claimed in claim 4, further comprising:
transmitting metadata describing the subject matter of video programs to the set-top box; and
performing processing in the set-top box to determine video programs of interest to the viewer using the metadata and the viewer preference data.
6. The method claimed in claim 5, further comprising providing alerts to the viewer for programs determined to be of interest to the viewer.

7. The method claimed in claim 5, further comprising automatically recording programs determined to be of interest to the viewer.

8. The method claimed in claim 5, wherein the metadata further comprises metadata describing the subject matter of segments of video programs; and

wherein said processing determines video programs and segments of video programs of interest to the viewer.

9. The method claimed in claim 4, wherein transmitting the updated viewer preference data to the set-top box is preceded by:

detecting the updated viewer preference data for the set-top box at the remote device;

transmitting a broadcast message from the remote device that includes the media access controller (MAC) address of the set-top box in the message; and

receiving in response to the broadcast message a request from the set-top box to transmit the updated viewer preference data.

10. The method claimed in claim 1, further comprising:

receiving metadata describing the subject matter of video programs at the remote device; and

performing processing at the remote device to determine video programs of interest to the viewer using the metadata and the viewer preference data.

11. The method claimed in claim 10, further comprising transmitting alerts to the set-top box for programs determined to be of interest to the viewer.

12. The method claimed in claim 10, further comprising transmitting instructions to the set-top box to automatically record programs determined to be of interest to the viewer.

13. The method claimed in claim 10, wherein the metadata further comprises metadata describing the subject matter of segments of video programs:
and

wherein said processing determines video programs and segments of video programs of interest to the viewer.

14. A method in a video distribution system, comprising:
receiving input from a user at a set-top box representing viewer preferences;
storing viewer preference data representing the viewer preferences in the set-top box;
transmitting the viewer preference data to a remote device; and
storing the viewer preference data at the remote device.

15. The method claimed in claim 14, further comprising:
receiving input from the user at the set-top box updating the viewer preferences; and
transmitting updated viewer preference data to the remote device for storage at the remote device.

16. The method claimed in claim 14, wherein the viewer preference data represents viewer preferences for subject matter corresponding to categories of a predefined the subject matter category hierarchy.

17. A method in a video distribution system, comprising:

detecting, at a set-top box, an event requiring reload of viewer preference data at the set-top box;

transmitting a request for the viewer preference data from the set-top box to a remote device;

transmitting viewer preference data associated with the set-top box from the remote device to the set-top box in response to the request; and

receiving and storing the viewer preference data at the set-top box.

18. The method claimed in claim 17, wherein the event is a set-top box reboot.

19. The method claimed in claim 17, wherein the event is a set-top box memory failure.

20. The method claimed in claim 17, wherein the event is a first launch of set-top box software.

21. The method claimed in claim 17, wherein the viewer preference data represents viewer preferences for subject matter corresponding to categories of a predefined the subject matter category hierarchy.

22. A method in a video distribution system, comprising:

storing viewer preference data associated with a set-top box in a database associated with a device that is remote from the set-top box;

updating the viewer preference data in the remote device in accordance with changes to a predefined subject matter category hierarchy used to represent viewer subject matter preferences in the viewer preference data; and

transmitting the updated viewer preference data to its associated set-top box from the remote device.

23. The method claimed in claim 22, wherein transmitting the updated viewer preference data to the set-top box is preceded by:

transmitting a broadcast message from the remote device that includes the media access controller (MAC) address of the set-top box in the message; and

receiving in response to the broadcast message a request from the set-top box to transmit the current viewer preference data.

24. The method claimed in claim 22, further comprising:
detecting updates made to the viewer preference data at a web server; and
updating the viewer preference data in a database in accordance with the updates made at the web server.

25. The method claimed in claim 22, wherein the remote device is a head end device of the video distribution system.

26. The method claimed in claim 22, wherein the remote device is a multiple service operator device of the video distribution system.